

Stop worrying, be happy about Port parking

Written by Ozaukee Press

Wednesday, 05 December 2012 17:28

Parking is much easier and friendlier in downtown Port Washington than at malls and big-box stores

Port Washington's downtown has had its ups and downs over the past few decades, but one aspect of the business district has remained constant: Parking paranoia is still the Great Satan, a terrifying bogeyman that provokes obsessive worry and sleepless nights. In Port, Chicken Little doesn't warn the sky is falling; she warns the parking is failing.

No sooner did the news about the downtown start getting better—the opening of the Duluth Trading Co. store, a coming museum, the renaissance of the Lueptow/Boerner building—than the handwringing began anew. How are we going to provide parking for all those visitors and shoppers? Do we need a multi-level parking structure?

Settle down, folks. Port Washington does not have a parking problem. It has a parking asset. Other towns and shopping areas would kill for Port's parking.

The city has more parking now—acres upon acres of it on main commercial streets, side streets and numerous public parking lots—than it had when it was a thriving retail center attracting so many shoppers from a wide trade area that it had downtown traffic jams.

And parking space is increasing, thanks to the new owner of the Lueptow/Boerner building buying two properties behind Franklin Street (with one structure already razed and another slated to be demolished) expressly to provide more parking space.

Port's parking lots let shoppers park closer to stores than they are able to at malls and big-box stores, adding to the appeal of small-town shopping as an alternative to driving considerable distances for the dubious privilege of parking in crowded megalots (think Grafton's Costco on a weekend) or, worse, creepy parking structures and walking long distances, often through harassing traffic, to and from stores.

All downtown Port parking lots are just a few steps away from sidewalks that provide a safe, easy stroll to stores. Shopping mall and big-box parking lots are notoriously hostile to pedestrians, who have to share space on the pavement with vehicles.

The city does a good job managing competing needs for its downtown parking space, recognizing that people who live and work in the heart of the city are as important to the downtown as shoppers. The sale of monthly parking passes for metered lots—all day for workers or 24/7 for residents at higher cost—has been a successful program.

(Most of the employees of Port Publications, Inc., owner of Ozaukee Press and one of the largest downtown employers, park in public lots off Grand Avenue, Washington Street or Pier

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Street.)

From time to time there are complaints about downtown workers usurping two-hour parking spaces meant for shoppers. It has even been reported that a few people spy out of workplace windows on the tire-marking activities of the city's parking enforcer and then sneak out to rub off chalk marks or move their cars to another two-hour space.

Well, the Port Washington Police Department is on the case, though its response seems more like a pat on the backs of the offenders than a slap on their wrists. As part of its 2013 parking initiative in cooperation with Main Street and the Chamber of Commerce, the PWPD is actually going to stop giving tickets for two-hour violations during the month of January. According to Police Chief Kevin Hingiss, parking violators will given be "yellow written warnings" instead of parking tickets during the month. That sounds more like a license to park all day in a two-hour space than a move to assure parking turnover. In any case, the problem will probably go away when employers realize that valuable time is being wasted by workers on the clock trying to one-up the parking ticket lady—time that would be better spent walking from a nearby parking lot.

It says something when the biggest parking problem Port can come up with is a few scofflaws rubbing off chalk marks. It says Port doesn't really have a parking problem.